1: Rosen E-5 (1901-1902) 1924 SK6 Choroti SK6

CHAPTER VI.

The Choroti (6). Family Life and Social Organization. Superstition. Illness and Death.

Marriage customs. Division of labour. Chiefs. Medicine men. Belief in evil spirits. Magic means of protection. Illness. Exorcism. Fairy darts. Physical therapeutics. Death. Burial. Belief in a future existence.

A Choroti man, as a rule, has only one wife, but among the part of 595
the tribe that has been in close intercourse with the Chiriguano, it is not an uncommon thing for the chiefs to possess several wives, as, for instance, the chief of the Choroti Indians living in the neighbourhood of Tatarenda (close on the border of the Chiriguano country), who had no less than three spouses. In fig. 178 is seen this chief holding one of his sons by the hand; to the left of the boy there is the chief's »number-one» wife, grown old and ugly, and on the man's right is his second wife, the mother of the boy. His third wife, who is not included in the picture, was quite a young girl.

Among the Choroti it is the women who take the initiative in amor- 832
ous relations. As a rule, this is done at dances which take place in seasons when food is abundant, and the Indians accordingly find it fitting to dance and amuse themselves. In his book »Indianliv», Nordenskiöld has given a very vivid description of such nocturnal mating dances, and in the preceding chapter I have (pp. 149, 150) quoted from him.

When a girl has reached mature age, she enters into free and un- 836
restricted relations with now one, now another, of the men, but finally she finds for herself a partner for life (see fig. 179). Having once taken this step, she usually keeps faithful to her husband. If a Choroti girl should happen to become pregnant, she sets about procuring abortion, and in [847]
that way she as a rule avoids having any children before becoming a

wife. [p. 159]

1: Rosen E-5 (1901-1902) 1924 SK6 Choroti SK6

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Fig. 179. A girl, and the lover she has chosen for herself. Choroti. Gran Chaco, Bolivia. Photo. E. v. R.

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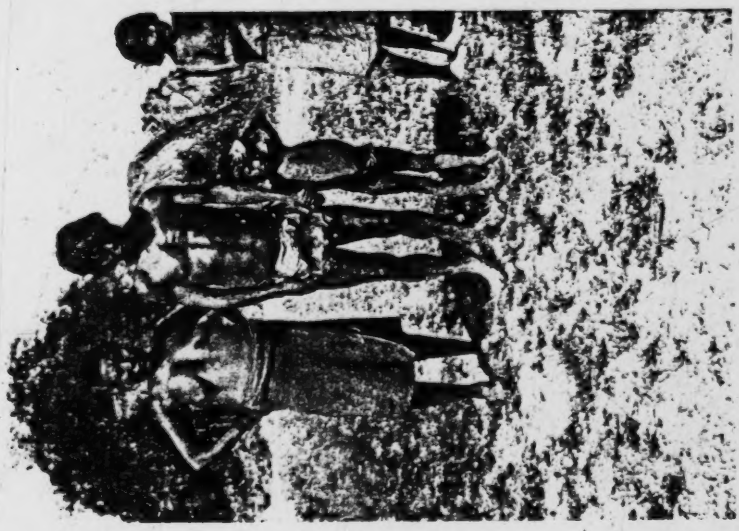

Fig. 178. A chief, with his son and two of his three wives. Choroti. Gran Chaco, Bolivia. Photo. E. v. R.

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2: Karsten E-5 (1911-1913)1932 S17 Mataco

Choroti SK6

584 the Indians live a happy and joyous life. We may therefore say that this is the proper »pairing-season» of the Chaco tribes, and particularly of the Choroti. At other times of the year, when fruit becomes scarce and life to the Indians is often a hard struggle for existence, they are little inclined 584 for merry-making, love, and marriage. In October, when the very nutri- tive chañar fruit ripens, the Chaco Indian is, as it were, revived, and a 535 few weeks later, when the algaroba and the tusca trees give their much ●836 appreciated fruit, his life is at its gayest, manifesting itself of course in his sexual interests also. Those young men and women who want to be married then wander about from one village to the other, where dances take place. In each village three dances, those called *Jóhlōki*, *Ahlénta*, and *Avúshe*, are performed on four successive evenings. Free sexual intercourse is connected with these dances, and the girls play an important rôle in them although they do not actively take part in the entertainment. The dances of the Chaco Indians are mainly entertainments of the men. The girls generally content themselves with merely looking at the dancing youths, making their choice among them. Incidentally however a girl may be seen dancing for a while behind a man whom she particularly likes with her hands laid upon his shoulders, and after the dance she takes him away and keeps him for that night. This is something one may notice after each dance, and thus the Choroti dances during the »season» often have the character of real sexual orgies. The last *Avúshe*-dance on the fourth evening is, however, supposed to be decisive as far as marriage is concerned; those girls who have found the men whom they want to marry then keep them not only for the night, but for ever. The young man is taken to the village and house of the girl where he stays as her husband, becoming a member of his wife's family.

584 The *Avúshe* may therefore be called the proper courtship and marriage dance of the Choroti. The very name of the dance is interesting from this 535 point of view. The Choroti word *avúshe* means 'vulture' — not the black vulture, but another kind common in the Chaco[1]) — and the name therefore may be translated as »the Vulture-dance». The idea of the Indians seems to be that just as the vultures jump and dance round their prey, the dead animal, so the Choroti men in the *Avúshe* dance jump round the girls trying to »conquer» them. The girls at this dance, it should be understood, stand within the ring formed by the dancing men. All the young men who take part in the dance are dressed in their best clothes

[1]) *Polyborus vulgaris.*